

Open Statement of Support for the Reinstatement of Professor Steven G. Salaita
Graduate Students of
The Department of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

We, the undersigned graduate students in the Department of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership (EPOL) in the College of Education (COE), write to express our deep dismay and strong opposition to the decision of President Robert A. Easter, Chancellor Phyllis Wise, and the Board of Trustees to fire Professor Steven G. Salaita from his appointment within the American Indian Studies Program (AIS) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). UIUC administrators' statement of civility strikes us as narrow and subjective, leaving more in the campus community at risk than it alleges to protect. In no way do Professor Salaita's words, tweets, or presence on campus make us feel unsafe, disrespected, or threatened, as your public letter indicated. We support Professor Salaita and his right to speak out through social media against the devastating assaults on Gaza this past July that has resulted in the deaths of over 2000 Palestinian civilians, including children. These children represent, to us in EPOL, our own communities and families that are placed at risk everyday. These children, in many ways, resemble the students in k-12 classrooms across the nation we seek to protect through our scholarship. As members of targeted minoritized populations in the U.S. and abroad, many of us empathize with Palestinians in Gaza. Professor Salaita's public repudiations of the inhumane atrocities committed against his people are understandable.

Our university and academic futures are at risk due to the administration's decision to fire Professor Salaita. The world is watching and responding. Salaita's firing has prompted boycotts of our campus, marginalizing faculty and students alike. Our growing inability to operate optimally on several indicators reflects the harm inflicted upon students by UIUC administration through their decision to terminate Salaita's employment. Each day Professor Salaita remains displaced from his position at UIUC, our ability to engage in critical, creative, and innovative ways suffers under the threat of concern over how civility might be used against us in the days to come. Further, we do know that the value of our degrees from UIUC in the academic market is rapidly diminishing due to this polarizing issue.

Chancellor Wise's recent position, backed by President Easter and the Board of Trustees to stay the course regarding Salaita's wrongful termination is disheartening, to say the least. During her visit with faculty and students at the COE on September 9, 2014, we attempted to educate the Chancellor [after all this is why she said she was visiting with our College: to listen and learn] on the tremendous risks and disproportionate burden students, and faculty of color, experience because of the University's arbitrary and discriminatory administrative practices. Chancellor Phyllis Wise steadfastly contended that reinstating Professor Salaita "would not be wise." Our contentions have seemingly fallen on deaf ears, as this resolution is misaligned with the recommendations of many.

We value free speech, particularly within institutions of higher education, where higher thought should be the goal. This issue threatens the academic integrity of this University and needs to be rectified now. Graduate students of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership in the College of Education urge the Board of Trustees to reinstate Professor Salaita.

Sincerely,

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